


Reinventing Society Through Entrepreneurship

Juliana Rotich's personal  mission is to make, fix and help others through technology. (Courtesy of Juliana Rotich)


A guest blog post by Juliana Rotich.

When we think of societal transformation, we imagine a rigorous activism geared toward changing a political system or advancing a social cause. Rarely, do we look at the ways in which our day-to-day today labor can bring about the same change while creating revenue. This is how I view social entrepreneurship; it is not just an extension of the nonprofit sector, but a business opportunity. In working toward the creation of new social value, social entrepreneurship embraces the visions of both nonprofit and business culture.

Whereas entrepreneurship starts with the recognition and evaluation of an opportunity, social entrepreneurship carries on to establish what critical societal needs this venture will serve. At the heart of most social entrepreneurship ventures, you will find a persistent resolve to address social problems of poverty and marginalization. A perfect example is the use of technology to foster inclusivity and build capacity in local communities. If we examine the various ways technology has extended our capabilities, and more importantly has inspired interconnectedness, we can see how digital entrepreneurs might use these aspects to meet the needs of marginalized groups around the world. But efforts to bring a voice to the voiceless must be sustainable. We must devise inclusive ideas that can be incorporated into the larger socio-political framework to affect future regulation and policies.

Juliana is co-founder of [Ushahidi Inc](#) and [BRCK Inc.](#), and is a trustee of the [iHub](#). She serves as strategic advisor on the councils of [BASF](#) and [Microsoft 4Afrika](#), and is an [MIT Media Lab](#) Director's Fellow and [TED Senior Fellow](#).

Delivering Hope to Mothers

Nigerian entrepreneur Adepeju Jaiyeoba meets President Obama. (White  House/Pete Souza)

Some [40,000 women](#) in Nigeria stand to die during pregnancy this year.

This statistic became a reality for Adepeju Jaiyeoba, 31, when she lost a close friend to childbirth complications in 2011. The loss jolted her into action.

That year, Jaiyeoba started the [Brown Button Foundation](#), a nonprofit organization that trains birth attendants in Nigeria's rural villages. To date, the organization has trained more than 8,000 birth attendants, who, like midwives, provide health care to expectant mothers during pregnancy and childbirth.

But Jaiyeoba, a lawyer by trade, quickly realized mothers-to-be in her country needed more than advocacy, and their attendants needed more than training. In 2013, she launched [Mother's Delivery Kit](#), a social enterprise that provides sterile supplies for childbirth. Each kit costs around \$5, and the company employs some 85 people.

Jaiyeoba says the Mother's Delivery Kit model is not only helping to save women and babies but also bringing income to the people who make and distribute the kits. More than 20,000 kits have been produced.

Bypassing Roadblocks

While these numbers reveal the success of Jaiyeoba's efforts, they obscure the challenges she has faced. When she first shared her delivery kit idea with a colleague, she was warned not to give up her prestigious job as a lawyer. But after two months, Jaiyeoba became restless and approached someone else: her pediatrician brother.

With savings from her legal work and expert advice from her sibling, Jaiyeoba created 200 sample kits. "We sent out samples to different communities, and we were keen on getting feedback to improve the product," she said. It soon became clear that birth attendants in other parts of the country had different practices and preferences.

So Jaiyeoba and the team assembled a new kit that they hoped the majority of Nigerians would embrace. One adjustment was to include olive oil — since many Nigerians, particularly in rural areas, rub both the mother and baby in the oil for spiritual protection.

Now that Jaiyeoba had something she knew people would use, she needed to find a better way to get it to them. She began to rethink her supply chain to get around Nigeria's ailing infrastructure. With grant money from the U.S. African Development Foundation, Jaiyeoba's team established distribution points in central and eastern Nigeria. Now, the delivery kits no longer need to leave from Lagos, making them more accessible to people in rural areas.

A Presidential Pitch

Jaiyeoba became a [Mandela Washington Fellow](#) in 2014 and has used her friendships with other fellows to expand her company's reach. She is working with Ghanaian fellow Laud Ampomah Boateng to provide delivery kits in districts across Ghana and creating a mobile platform focused on prenatal care, child rearing and infertility with Côte d'Ivoirian fellow Jean-Patrick Ehouman.

In May 2015, she was one of five emerging entrepreneurs invited to [pitch her idea](#) at a White House event showcasing the impact of U.S. government initiatives. It also set the stage for the upcoming

[Global Entrepreneurship Summit](#) in Kenya.


The event gave her a chance to look back on the obstacles she faced. “You can actually build business models around social problems,” she said.

Lessons Learned

Starting her own nonprofit foundation and social enterprise has taught Jaiyeoba a lot. Here is her advice for YALI Network members:

- *Share your ideas and get feedback.* “I get that people hide their ideas because they are afraid of somebody else stealing it, but if somebody else steals your idea, it is because it is easy,” Jaiyeoba said. “It’s important to share your ideas to receive constructive criticism, and to use the criticism, to ultimately create a better product or service for your public.”
 - *Start with your network.* “Most young people still believe the first thing you need when starting out is money,” Jaiyeoba said. “It’s not true. You need money to build and scale your business, but you must focus on building your network first.”
 - *Show your passion.* “Let people see your passion and understand what you are offering,” Jaiyeoba said. “That’s the way to find people who will make sure your idea sees the light of day.”
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Connecting Artisans in Kenya with Consumers Everywhere


Soko artisans like Veronica can connect to a global market with just a mobile phone. 
(Courtesy of Soko)

For years, women throughout Kenya have made money by making jewelry. But the global market is complex. Middlemen often control access, and that has limited these artisans’ earning potential.

In 2011, Kenyan entrepreneur Catherine Mahugu thought technology could help.

Armed with a bachelor’s degree in computer science, Mahugu teamed up with U.S. entrepreneurs Ella Peinovich and Gwendolyn Floyd to start [Soko](#), an e-commerce platform where artisans can sell their jewelry to consumers around the world using basic mobile phones.


“It’s a brand that helps fashion a better world,” Mahugu said of Soko, revealing marketing savvy in her description.

Women own nearly 75 percent of the vendors registered with Soko. (Courtesy of 
Soko)

Mahugu said Soko's platform breaks from traditional business models by offering women at the beginning of the supply chain access to the global market. These artisans do not need a computer, Internet access or even a bank account – just a mobile phone.

Artisans register with the company, then upload product photos to Soko's e-commerce platform. When a consumer purchases an item, Soko sends a courier to pick it up and have it shipped.

Mahugu's approach has proven popular. In 2014, more than 1,000 artisans were registered. They sold 42,000 items to consumers in 30 countries. What's more, their average household income grew by 400 percent.

Soko's staff makes funny faces for the camera. Mahugu is in the front row, fourth  from the left. (Courtesy of Soko)

While the numbers explain the company's popularity with artisans, Mahugu said she has faced real challenges in ramping up the company. Here are the challenges she talked of and solutions the team at Soko is employing to beat them:

Failing infrastructure. "We have an in-house logistics network just to compensate for the lack of [transportation] infrastructure here [in Kenya] and the incomplete addresses," Mahugu said.


Unreliable services. Power interruptions and Internet outages make coordination difficult, especially because many artisans live in rural areas with less power and connectivity. To compensate, Soko has developed resilient operational tools for an online model. "We've been able to apply [these tools] through an offline social network," Mahugu said. These tools mean that Soko can function even when the power goes out.

Slow technology adoption. "The e-commerce culture in Africa has yet to blossom like it has in the developed countries," Mahugu said. Soko accepts mobile money "just to tackle the issue of distrust of online payments." The company also settles disputes through social media. These methods provide a positive customer experience.

Soko hopes to expand its platform to artisans in other African countries. Mahugu said there are key indicators as to whether a country is a viable market for the e-commerce platform. They include the availability of mobile money, the adoption rate of new technology, the reliability of shipping services, the quality of existing infrastructure and government policies toward entrepreneurs.

"Internet connectivity is just revolutionizing how businesses in Africa operate," Mahugu said. To be successful, entrepreneurs must "go with the tide of change and innovation, not against it."

Online Learning Blossoms in Zimbabwe

Teresa Mbagaya at the launch of 
EcoSchool (Courtesy of Teresa
Mbagaya)

A growing number of young Africans are building innovative technologies and businesses. In Zimbabwe, online learning blossomed under Teresa Mbagaya, a 28-year-old Kenya native who in 2013 launched [Econet Education](#), which offers free and reliable access to more than 50 online education services featuring video lectures by university faculty and other educational materials accessible to anyone, anywhere.

The youngest executive to lead Econet Education, Mbagaya was named one of the “30 most promising young entrepreneurs in Africa 2015” by Forbes business magazine.

Econet Education subjects range from test preparation to how to start a business, to agriculture, engineering, medicine, languages and music theory. The service even has an early education section that includes sites for kids run by National Geographic magazine and the American Public Broadcasting Service.

Its EcoSchool section offers tablets on which students can access textbooks at low cost.

“The idea behind EcoSchool goes beyond simply making books available at a cheaper price,” Mbagaya says. “It is part of [a] strategy to help students and their lecturers gain access to materials and courses from across the globe.”


The EcoSchool tablets and software significantly improved the learning experience, especially for girls who could not stay late at libraries. With the lightweight, portable devices, they could study after school at home and pay as little as \$6 a month for study materials.

EcoSchool includes a textbook library, an educational chat platform allowing social interaction between students on study material, and an online education resource center so users can check for faculty-related resources on career development and study programs from global sources.

“EcoSchool offers digital education for all, giving you access to quality information, anywhere, anytime. Think of EcoSchool as education for the digital generation,” the service states on its website. So far, EcoSchool is available only to Harare-based Econet Wireless subscribers in Zimbabwe.

Recognizing Mbagaya’s entrepreneurship in information technology, Microsoft recently named her head of education for East and southern Africa.

Computer Scientist Lends a Hand to Farmers, Young Women

Lisa Katusiime and Isaac Omiat co- 
founded the AgroMarketDay application
in Uganda. (Courtesy of Lisa Katusiime)

In Uganda, the local agriculture markets that many small-scale farmers depended on were inefficient. Often, neither customers nor farmers knew which markets would be open on which days. So farmers only had access to a limited number of customers. That limited their profits.

Farmers' profits were further complicated by middlemen who knew the current market price of a product while the farmers did not. The middlemen could buy from a farmer and sell the product at a higher price to customers.

As a student at Makerere University in Kampala, YALI Network member Lisa Katusiime decided she could do something to make the country's agriculture marketing system more efficient. With fellow student Isaac Omiat, in 2013 she created [AgroMarketDay](#), a mobile phone application that enables smallholder farmers to get their products to the right markets at the right time and at the right price.

The app also enables farmers to access farm inputs like seeds, fertilizers and tools. The application features information about modern methods of raising crops, livestock and fish. The co-founders won startup funding from communications company Orange Uganda Limited. Katusiime, now 24, who in 2014 received a bachelor's degree in software engineering, serves as AgroMarketDay's business development manager. Omiat, now 27, a former farmer, is the venture's lead developer.

"I have a clear, logical mind with a practical approach to problem-solving and a drive to see things through to completion," says Katusiime, who also co-founded Likamis Software Limited, a company that develops computer and mobile phone applications and games. Her passion for information and communications technology in agriculture enabled her to reach out to youth involved in the Young Farmers Coalition of Uganda. An advocate for girls in communications, she is a member of Afchix, or African Women in Technology, which encourages girls to study for careers in computers and technology. In 2013, she was invited to speak at the Grace Hopper Celebration of Women in Computing in the United States.

"I advise young women interested in information and communications technology (ICT) to go ahead and pursue their careers. ... Women, too, can make it in the ICT space," says the semi-finalist for the 2014 U.S. [Global Innovation through Science and Technology](#) competition for science and technology entrepreneurs from emerging economies.


"The competition helped me to create awareness for AgroMarketDay and got me to interact with

many people, which greatly helped me improve my marketing skills,” she says.

“I advise young African entrepreneurs or potential entrepreneurs to identify their passion, follow it, dream it and live it, because when you identify your passion you are unstoppable,” she says.

Of YALI she says, “It inspires and motivates me every time I see fellow young people’s achievements featured.”

What Business Models Work in Africa? Part 2

Amrote Abdella (Courtesy of Amrote 
Abdella)

We asked Amrote Abdella, director of Startup Engagement & Partnerships, Africa Initiatives at Microsoft, to tell YALI Network members about business models that work in Africa.

Question:

How have the various business models developed in Africa over recent years?

Abdella:

- *Collaboration with innovation hubs.* The last two years have seen a proliferation of technology hubs, incubators and accelerators that have been used as mechanisms to engage the community of a new generation of young Africans trying new ideas. The World Bank estimates the existence of about 90 innovation hubs in over 30 countries in Africa. AfriLabs, a pan-African network of technology and innovation hubs, makes up 35 of these. Two of these hubs, the Co-Creation hub in Nigeria and the iHub in Kenya, have been recognised as best-performing models. The iHub has launched 152 successful local startups to date, encouraging the local Kenyan government to commit to establishing a tech hub in each of its 47 counties.
- *Startup funding.* According to 4Afrika, startups at different phases require different types of financing. In Africa, over the years it has moved from savings and loans from family and friends to a more formal form of funding, including seed funding from competitions and equity financing, among others.
- *Public-private partnerships.* The [informal sector contributes about 55 percent of sub-Saharan Africa’s GDP](#), while SMEs [small and medium-sized businesses] make up 95 percent of African businesses. Though there’s been mostly some separate efforts from both the public and the private sector, there’s still a partnership opportunity to create an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive in areas of skills transfer, financing, incentives and tendering process

that promotes small business.

- *Online platforms.* There's an emergency of online platforms for entrepreneurs in Africa providing resources, such as [Biz4Afrika](#), [She Leads Africa](#) and online retailing platforms such as [Fashpa.com](#) and [Skrill](#). The platforms need to grow from being a resource center to an avenue that creates meaningful contacts for intra-African and international trade, hence enabling the entrepreneurs to monetize.


Question:

How do you define a successful business in Africa?

Abdella:

- Sustainable monetization.
- Ability to scale the solutions.
- Ability to create job opportunities.

What Business Models Work in Africa? Part 1

Amrote Abdella (Courtesy of 
Amrote Abdella)

We asked Amrote Abdella, director of Startup Engagement & Partnerships, Africa Initiatives at Microsoft, to tell YALI Network members about business models in Africa.

Question:

What are the top four business models that work in Africa?

Abdella:

1. Collaboration with innovation hubs and accelerators: Most technology companies (Microsoft, Google, IBM, etc.) connect startups to innovation hubs and accelerators from across Africa. [These] are instrumental in connecting developers and startups with the right partners to get the resources and support they need to get their ideas to the market.

Example: [AfriLabs](#) is a pan-African network of technology innovation hubs. It was founded in 2011 to build a community around rapidly emerging tech hubs — spaces that serve as physical nexus

points for developers, entrepreneurs and investors. AfriLabs is working through these spaces to build an innovation infrastructure that will encourage the growth of Africa's knowledge economy by supporting the development of startups, technology and innovation.

2. Innovation grants/funding for startups: Based on the uniqueness and scalability of the solutions, the startups are reviewed and by merit selected to receive the innovation grant. The funds enable local entrepreneurs who want to develop new innovative technology to solve Africa's and the world's challenges.

Example: [AGIN](#), a Microsoft 4Afrika innovation grant recipient. AGIN's solution uses feature phones to provide valuable, relevant information to farmers while at the same time capturing vital data about the smallholder farmer, for example, size of farm, GPS location, soil composition, weather information, crops grown, previous yield, and so on, and uses this data to establish a credit profile for the farmer. This profile is then made available to key service providers like banks, insurance providers, agricultural input providers and buyers to gain visibility into the financial status of the farmer. Over 135K farmers are profiled through AGIN and actively consuming services on Azure and Hosted Exchange on feature phones.

3. Public-private partnerships: Multinationals and government bodies working together to provide an enabling environment and policies for entrepreneurs to thrive.

Example: [M-KOPA](#) is an SME [small/medium-sized enterprise] that provides "pay-as-you-go" renewable energy for off-grid households in Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. The East African governments offer VAT [value-added tax] exemption on all solar products, which is a big saving for small companies like M-KOPA.

4. Online platforms for entrepreneurs: These provide essential services and a platform for intra-Africa trade.

Example: [Biz4Afrika](#) is a growing Africa-wide network of SMEs designed to enable a sustainable and connected community of entrepreneurs that will have a meaningful impact on job creation, global competitiveness and wealth creation in the long run. In the past year alone, we've seen 140,000 SMEs go online across Africa — to offer and to consume services enabled by technology.

Disability, Inclusion Featured in Latest Live #YALICHAT



"My exercise of my rights can be limited when it makes your exercise of your rights impossible." — David Saperstein, U.S. ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom

“Disabled people and their family and friends must speak up when they believe that they are being disrespected or discriminated against.” — Judith Heumann, U.S. special adviser for international disability rights


During a live, three-day Facebook Q&A that ended July 2, Heumann and Saperstein responded to questions from YALI Network members about tolerance, disability and inclusion.

Here are excerpts from the chat:

Question:

How can we get empowered and mobilize our society and nation at large to recognize disability rights to enhance inclusion in employment and higher education?

Heumann:

You can become empowered by organizing with other persons with disabilities and other minorities in your community. Identify a high-level person to help advocate for the cause. 

Question:

Too often, in [my country], people with a disability are found in the street fetching a livelihood. What is the responsibility of government to give hope to those people?

Heumann:

It is the responsibility of the disabled community to demand the government take steps toward equal access so that persons with disabilities can contribute to their societies.

Question:

What do you think can be done to move governments from taking a tokenist approach to addressing disability issues?

Heumann:

Collaboration with organizations outside the disability community is critical. Governments are moved when they know that disabled people and their families and friends participate in elections, run for office and play an active role in their communities.

My personal experience working at the local and national levels is that we, as disabled people, must learn how to present our messages clearly, [and] work with other groups who are working together, not only with the disabled.

Question:

We had a situation where a disabled female was selected to do nursing, but due to her disability, the nursing council of Malawi refused to take her. Can we say her right of choosing the educational field of her choice was violated? What strategies should government put in place to make sure that disabled people can freely embark on any activity that they wish to do?

Heumann:

She experienced discrimination that keeps her from accomplishing her goals. When I finished college, I was denied my teaching license because I couldn't walk. I challenged that decision, and was granted my [teaching] license.

Question:

I am an African living in the U.S. What do you suggest to religions that don't want to participate in gay and lesbian marriage? Will the churches lose their license as [nonprofits]?

Saperstein:

We are not advocating or forcing anyone to change their religious views. We merely advocate that all individuals, including LGBTI individuals, be treated with dignity, respect and fairness and given equal rights. Specifically, that LGBTI individuals not be subject to criminal sanctions and that they be protected from governmental or societal persecution.

Embracing Diversity

"Our Nation derives strength from the diversity of its population and from its commitment to equal opportunity for all. We are at our best when we draw on the talents of all parts of our society, and our greatest accomplishments are achieved when diverse perspectives are brought to bear to overcome our greatest challenges." — President Obama



Embracing diversity is not just a matter of social justice; it enriches countries and promotes human worth. Unfortunately, all around the world, individuals are subjected to discrimination, exclusion, persecution and violence for simply being "different."

Embracing diversity not only strengthens the human rights of minorities, but also fortifies societies as a whole. When a community recognizes the potential of all its citizens, it is more secure, stable, innovative, prosperous and able to address its problems.

This is an issue in which we all have a stake, and it touches on individuals, corporations and governments in every corner of the world. All communities must debate and discuss these issues and work together to drive positive change for all members of society. Change starts with educating ourselves and making a commitment to inclusive growth.


Starting on Tuesday, June 30, Special Adviser for International Disability Rights Judith Heumann and Ambassador-at-large for International Religious Freedom David Saperstein will host a three-day Facebook chat, where they will discuss the intersection of religious tolerance, disability rights and

human rights and provide recommendations on promoting diversity, combating stigma and countering violence.

Help push this conversation forward with your questions or comments. We look forward to hearing your ideas on how to improve diversity in your community.

This is a guest blog post from the [U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor](#). The bureau works to promote freedom and democracy and protect human rights around the world.

Including People with Disabilities Pays Off for U.S. Businesses

This refreshable Braille keyboard enables people with visual disabilities to read  information displayed on a computer. (©AP Images)

The strength of any country lies in its ability to tap the talents, skills and potential of all its citizens. In the United States, nearly one in five Americans has a physical or mental disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) makes it possible for this population to participate fully in business, politics and the arts in the United States.

Signed into law in 1990, the ADA does these things:

- Prevents employers from discriminating against a qualified individual with a disability.
- Requires state and local governments to provide equal access to public programs and services such as public transportation.
- Ensures the equal enjoyment of goods, services and facilities of public places such as restaurants, hotels and theaters.
- Compels telecommunication companies to provide functionally equivalent services to persons with disabilities, such as closed captioning for the hearing-impaired.
- Makes it illegal to retaliate against individuals who exercise or help others exercise their rights under the law.

Implementing the ADA has spurred innovation, improved employee performance, opened new business markets and provided all Americans the benefits of an inclusive society. However, many businesses, local governments and other entities initially expressed concerns about implementing the ADA. For example, some business owners worried about how hiring persons with disabilities would affect their operating costs, product quality and employee productivity.

Over the past 25 years, some concerns proved legitimate and were addressed through tax incentives and legislative revisions. Other concerns proved fallacious. Let's take a closer look.

Concern:

Employing people with disabilities will negatively affect efficiency and operations.

Reality:

The ADA does not require employers to hire anyone who is not qualified for the job. Candidates who do not possess the skills, experience or education — or who cannot perform essential job duties — are not considered qualified and are not protected under the ADA.

While the ADA does not mandate the hiring of unqualified candidates, hiring qualified candidates who happen to have a disability has proved good for business. People with disabilities bring a different perspective to the workplace, including a better understanding of how to meet the needs of other people with disabilities. This translates into new processes, products and services. The hearing-impaired, for example, pioneered the use of SMS messaging long before it became the de facto mode of communication for mobile phone users.

By employing people with disabilities, a business attracts new market segments not only through innovation, but also through diversity. According to a 2006 consumer attitudes survey, 87 percent of U.S. consumers prefer to patronize businesses that hire people with disabilities.

Concern:

Accommodating persons with disabilities will be too costly.

Reality:

The majority of employees with disabilities do not require accommodations. According to a 2012 Job Accommodation Network study, 57 percent of accommodations cost nothing to make, while the rest typically cost around \$500. The IRS also offers an annual tax credit of up to \$5,000 to small businesses that provide reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities. A reasonable accommodation could include providing alternatives to architectural barriers — such as a ramp in place of stairs — or acquiring new equipment such as screen-reading software.

U.S. employers have reaped other benefits from implementing the ADA. That same Job Accommodation Network study found that providing reasonable accommodations resulted in retaining valuable employees, increasing employee productivity and eliminating new-employee training costs. Employers also reported boosts to overall morale and productivity.

A North Carolina snack food company, for example, recorded a jump of 70 percent to 95 percent in productivity after hiring employees with disabilities. Employee retention increased, and absenteeism dropped.

Concern:

Serving persons with disabilities will negatively affect business.

Reality:

Like accommodating disabled employees, accommodating customers with disabilities is good for business. According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy,

persons with disabilities represent the United States' third-largest market segment. Serving the 54 million Americans with disabilities gives a business access to more than \$200 billion in discretionary consumer income.

A major U.S. hotel chain, for example, noticed a 260 percent increase in net revenues after it began offering ADA-compliant rooms and training staff to serve guests with disabilities.
